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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 FREETOWN 000402

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SL](#)  
SUBJECT: SIERRA LEONE CLOSES BOOK ON LOCAL ELECTIONS

REF: FREETOWN 300

11. Summary: The winners of the local elections were inaugurated in regional events August 8 through 11. The swearing-in ceremonies were the last step in finalizing the results, ending a hectic 12-month period in which three major elections were held. This most recent round of elections were relatively unblemished by irregularities, resulted in more women being voted into local office than ever before, and showcased resounding victories, both expected and unexpected, for the All People's Congress Party in a number of locations. Sierra Leone now faces the challenge of ensuring that lessons learned throughout this election period are remembered for the next major test of democratic practice and principles, the 2012 elections. End Summary.

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ELECTION STATISTICS  
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12. Final election statistics, as reported by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) are as follows:

- The final average national turnout was 38.8%. The low turnout relative to the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary elections (75.8%) continues to be attributed to voter fatigue and apathy.
- Of 5,883 polling stations, 14 were invalidated due to voter turnout reported in excess of 100%. The NEC has assured the public that these incidences of electoral malfeasance have been turned over to the authorities for investigation and prosecution.
- The total number of votes entered was 1,056,440. Of the total votes, 61,916 were invalid, representing 5.9% of the votes cast. This is less than the invalidated votes for the Presidential (7.3%) and Parliamentary (8.94%) elections in 12007.
- By virtue of its size, Freetown had the highest number of polling stations and valid and invalid votes. Kenema had the second-highest number of voters and invalid votes. Prior to the elections, political parties and observers expressed concern that insufficient voter education, particularly in locations with multi-ward ballots, would cause confusion at the polls and increase the chances of invalid votes. The statistics show that concerns for large-scale invalidations were largely unfounded.
- The NEC received 167 complaints from political parties and candidates related to a number of issues, which are being investigated by the Sierra Leone Police and the NEC. The results from 20 polling stations were recounted as a result of the complaints.
- One instance was identified in which the wrong winner was declared. Due to a technical issue, an independent candidate in Ward 85 in Kono District was announced as the winner,

though the actual victor is the SLPP candidate. The matter was taken to court on August 11, and NEC officials expect the rightful winner to take his place on the Kono District Council shortly.

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ELECTION RESULTS  
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¶3. Final election results are as follows:

- Of the 19 mayoral or chairperson positions, the All People's Congress (APC) party won 10 positions, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) won 8 positions, and the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) won 1 position. In Bombali District, the winning candidate was elected unopposed.

- Of the 456 councilor positions, APC won 253, SLPP won 170, and PMDC won 16. Independent candidates successfully contested for 17 seats. Thirty-eight councilor seats were won in uncontested wards.

- While women were unsuccessful in mayoral/chairperson contests, 86 were elected for councilor positions. now representing 18.1% of councilors. This is a 65% increase from the 2004 local elections. There is now at least one woman on every council in the country.

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PARTY ANALYSIS  
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¶4. The APC are the resounding victors of the local elections, winning the majority of the overall positions being contested. They were successful in locations that are not typical APC strongholds, such as Koidu, Kono, Bo, and Bonthe (Note: Per reftel, allegations of voter intimidation by APC leadership in these areas were rampant prior to election day. Many will point to their unexpected victories as a sign that these allegations were true. Though it is impossible to determine how inappropriate and/or criminal behavior might have contributed to these results, it is likely that it did play a role. End Note.). The PMDC party expected a stronger showing in Bo District, but appear to have lost some momentum among their most reliable supporters. The SLPP expected better results overall, and will be conducting a post-mortem on what went wrong prior to their next party conference in November 2008.

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COMMENT  
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¶5. Though the local elections were not without some controversy, they are generally being viewed as free, fair, and an example of Sierra Leone's strong commitment to peace and democracy. The five years until the next nationwide elections can be viewed as both a challenge and an opportunity for the NEC - a challenge to maintain the ability to meet the standards set by the 2007 and 2008 elections, and an opportunity to use the current momentum and goodwill to firmly establish itself as a model for the region through further capacity-building and outreach efforts. End comment.  
FEDZER